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C. Hubert H. Parry
R.C.M

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We devoted so much of our attention to the great ones of the earth in the two past terms that we were in no humour to give attention to the composers who have ceased to appeal to us to the same extent. Beethoven and Schubert and Weber were of such a comprehensive calibre that they continue to have a personal hold upon us. But when we study the history of an Art we have ~~put~~ to put our own personal interests aside and do justice to many who were great figures in their time but addressed themselves to different types of mind from those of our own eager day. To be just we must look a good way back and recall

Branching off of Opera into various different types.

The Grand Opera of Paris.

The Opera Comique of Do.

The old Italian Opera Seria. Fidelio 1806 standing by itself.

The new German Opera heralded by Freischütz 1821.

composers who were even contemporaries of Beethoven's. Of course there was a vast crowd of them. The number of people who address themselves to the big public in Musical terms is always on the increase, and the diversity of their types of work increases too. We become conscious indeed of a new phase of Art, which is addressed to a different sort of audience from the old type. When we think of the works of John Sebastian, and his contemporaries and of Haydn and Mozart and Beethoven and Schubert we feel that they are addressed to people who at all events (were) intelligent lovers of art, to whom the composers addressed themselves sincerely in their own personalities. But as we approach nearer our own day we feel that music is expanding in the lower direction, and composers are

The pasteboard of the theatre.

beginning to think of what will please a big unintelligent public; and resorting more and more to cheap devices which pass muster with the unintelligent; and watching intently the expression of the big public, and making their work less from spontaneous personal impulse than to get the approval of that big public. This was of course especially the case in the line of Opera, where the temptation was most active. No doubt the earlier composers had written very poor twaddle to please the Aristocratic patrons, but their type of inadequacy was different from the type of cheapness which came from through composers addressing themselves to a democratic big uncultured audience. The Aristocratic Opera of Handel and Hasse was at all events not vulgar or devoid of a certain conventional artistic interest.

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But the tendency of at least one phase of Opera, especially Italian Opera and even French Grand Opera, was in the direction of mere insincere showiness in which finer genuinely musical qualities tended to disappear. One must admit that many worthy and faithful composers strove manfully to maintain the integrity of their art, but the works which won the popular approval and became types of what was worth composing, from the public point of view, became more and more empty and superficial (and) composers were inclined to become purveyors rather than originators. The tendency can be summed up in the demoralization which is implied in the transition from the standard of Mozart and Beethoven to Meyerbeer, Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti and the early Verdi.

The cue is solid early training and association with the theatre.

Of those who were thoroughly and even stiffly loyal to such high ideals as he could formulate for himself was Luigi Cherubini, who was born a good many years before Beethoven in 1760 and survived him many years even till 1842. He was born in Florence and came into touch with the Operatic Tradition very early, as his father was accompanist at the Pergola Theatre. He had lessons from his father and also with Sarti, a man of great repute at the time, at Bologna; and it was partly from him that he imbibed his extreme appreciation of the polyphonic style and Counterpoint of which in later times he was looked upon as the great authority. He confined himself to Church Music at first but came to the field as an Opera composer in 1780, with an Opera called Quinto Fabio. He followed this up with several more Italian Operas which were produced at Florence and elsewhere and established his reputation in that branch of Art. He came to London in 1784 and brought out 'Giulio Sabino' and 'La finta Principessa'

Anacreon what was technically called a Ballet Opera
in one act.

which were received with favour (not much) – and he was made royal court composer. Then in 1787 he went to Paris, and came in for the aftermath of the Gluck and Piccini controversy which had ended with Gluck's triumph with "Iphigenie in Tauride" 8 years before (1779). He was neither altogether a Gluckist not a Piccinist, but worked out his own line with intelligence. He produced a great number of Operas in Paris of which the most famous were "Lodoïska" which came out in 1791, "Medea" which came out in 1797, "Les deux journées" which came out in 1800 and "Anacreon" which came out in 1803. All the latter three indeed maintain their hold on the stage. Medea is severe but it would probably be performed more often but for the very exacting nature of the part of Medea. It was one of Mme Tietjens great parts. 'Les deux Journées' is famous on account of the excellence of its libretto. Anacreon is chiefly remembered for its Overture, which is one of the most perfect things

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of its kind in existence – ‘Visibly (?) fragrant of the grape’ as Joachim said to me when we were listening to a rehearsal at Birmingham – we have often played it and enjoyed it. When the ~~Con~~ famous Conservatoire was founded in Paris, Cherubini was named an inspector of that institution; but he laboured under the disadvantage of being disliked by Napoleon Bonaparte; and the Grand Opera being thence closed to him in 1805 he went to Vienna, where he brought out Lodoïska, and Faniska in 1806, with much success. He returned to Church Music in 1809, through an invitation to write music for the consecration of the Church of the Chimay; which resulted in his producing the Mass in F ~~one of his most famous compositions~~. In 1815 he came to London again on the invitation of the Philharmonic Society, which offered him £200 for an Overture and a Symphony and some other works which he conducted here. Later in 1816 he returned to Paris, was appointed Director of the Conservatoire in 1821, and established himself in

Beethoven had a great opinion of Cherubini and liked his Operas better than anyones. Cherubini was at the first performance of Fidelio - and his most characteristic remark was that he didn't know what key the Overture was in. His own Deux Journées (Wasserträger) was performed in Vienna the same year that Fidelio came out there – 1806.

that Metropolis, where he came to be looked upon as their great Musical Figure - A sort of Musical interest(?) indeed to whom all aspirants of Musical honours came for criticism and support.

Mendelssohn came across him in that capacity in one of his visits to Paris, probably in 1832; and his friend Hiller reported his having said about the old veteran "What an extraordinary creature it is! You would fancy a man could not be a great composer without sentiment, heart, feeling or whatever else you call it. But I believe Cherubini makes everything out of his head alone." We of course feel that ourselves. There is an inevitable dryness and frigidity about Cherubini's work which prevents his making an appeal to the softer and more romantic sides of our natures. But he was a man of great and rare powers, and his rank as a composer has been recognised by the various great Musicians with whom he came into contact. He forms a sort of link between the old order of Opera composers and the modern – as he was brought up

Messe Solenelle in C 1816. Requiem in C minor 1817.
(The most famous of these Church compositions)
Messe Solenelle in E 1818. Coronation Mass. 1825.
The Requiem in D for men's voices in 1836

in the atmosphere of the Italian Opera, and expanded under the influence of Operatic progress in his time, and became a notable representative of the group of composers who tried to give the drama as well as the music a chance. It is interesting to recall that beginning in Mozart's time he lived till within the year of the production of Wagner's Rienzi. In the latter part of his life he devoted himself mainly to Church Music, and his masses are always regarded as grand examples of their kind. But his position as a composer was (curiously enough) mainly in the Operatic line. And in that branch he excelled equally in serious and light Opera – As Medea is what is called a serious Grand Opera, and Les Deux Journées a lyric comedy Opera.

Mehul

In 1779 he heard the first performance of Iphigenie in Taurus. Deeply inspired. Went to Gluck who took an interest in him.

We must not forget a Parisian contemporary of his – Etienne Nicholas Mehul who was born at Givet in the Ardennes in 1763, the son of a cook. He began as an organist, but was drawn to the Operatic line, and his first Opera is said to have been ‘Euphrosine et Couradin’ which was produced in the Opera Comique in Paris in 1790. He is said to have come across Gluck, who recognised his dramatic gifts – and there is no doubt he was greatly influenced by that Composer’s works. He produced a number of Operas and ballets in Paris. He had the ~~honour~~ distinction of having an Opera hissed so heartily that it could not be played to the end! But this was not on account of the Music but because in the Opera “le Jeune Henri” he introduced a King just at the time that republican fervour

Uthal / Joseph

Died 1817

was at its hottest. However the Overture of the work was so great a success that it was encored at the first performance and has maintained some kind of hazardous hold as a performable work till our own times. His most famous works were Uthal which came out in 1806, and 'Joseph' which is the work by which he is chiefly remembered which came out in ~~1817~~ 1807. His reputation is founded on a certain amount of delicate character sentiment; which is especially magnificent in the last work. Even Wagner had rather a favourable opinion of it. He did not write much after the success of the work being disappointed at being a little overshadowed by the powerful productions of a new rival Spontini. His health broke down and he died in Paris in 1817. To us in these days his work seems thin and unimpressive.

Spontini

We must pay also a tribute of memory to Jean Francois Lesueur (who was born in the same year as Mehul 1763 near Abbeville); as he has the reputation of having exercised much influence on Berlioz, and anticipated some of Berlioz's views of programme music, and treatment of the Orchestra. He began in connection with Church Music as he was Maitre de Chapelle at several Churches and Cathedrals before he went finally to settle in Paris. He wrote masses and motets at first. Raised some excitement in Paris by some Instrumental Overtures which raised the discussion of the question of Programme Music in the periodicals of the day and made quite a little splash for a time. In the early days of the Revolution, 1793 etc onwards he brought out some Operas at the Theatre Feydeau. "La Caverne" Paul et Virginie – Telemaque. On the foundation of the Conservatoire he was appointed one of the staff and called Inspector. But his taste for writing about his theories in the periodicals got him into conflict with the Conservatoire and in 1801 he was dismissed. He continued to produce Opera and on the restoration of the Monarchy was reappointed as Professor of Composition at the Conservatoire. He obtained a great position and died in 1837.

Of aggressively different character from Mehul was the same Gasparo Spontini. One of the most striking figures in the Music of the earlier part of the 19th century. He was born of peasant parents in Majolati in 1774 and was therefore 10 years younger than Mehul. He worked at Naples and brought out a light Opera “Li puntigli delle donne” in Rome in 1796 after which he became for a time a pupil of Piccini. He devoted himself at first mainly to the light Italian or rather the Neapolitan Operatic style. He went to Paris in 1803, and tried the Parisian audiences with the same light Italian Operas, but without success. And then, in a manner which is a more honourable parallel to Meyerbeer later, he changed his tactics and tried Grand Opera on the very biggest lines; and composed the Vestale – one of the most remarkable Operas composed in that period of Art.

Berlioz was always pouring contempt on everyone round him. He hated Cherubini. Lesueur (who was his master in Composition) was the only one for whom he had any respect at all.

He was an odd character and seems to have made enemies in Paris and it was not performed till two years after it was written in 1807 – when it was first given at the Imperial Academy of Music with great success. It owed this success partly to the admirable qualities of the libretto by Jouy, but also to his own work which must be admitted to be very big and striking – and to have at times an unmistakable quality of modernity about it. He had a great reverence for Mozart and Gluck and aimed at making the most of the dramatic intention of his libretto. His orchestration, for the time when he lived is very remarkable – full, rich and efficient. It anticipated Berlioz in the elaboration of directions for performance. A notable point. In his own time it very naturally astonished the world who often said that it was so powerful that the voices could not be heard. Vestale has maintained a hold on the stage ever since, and is still I believe sometimes performed in Germany. It is rather its size and the big choruses and effects it requires that prevents

Fernand Cortez.

First performance of Don Giovanni

First performance of Don Giovanni at Prague in 1787.
Spontini's performance in Paris was between 1810
and 1812

Olympia

our having a try at it at College. Another Opera with a fine subject 'Fernand Cortez' came out ~~four~~ two years after Vestale in 1809 – and was also a success – He was made conductor of the Italian Opera at the Odeon in Paris and he distinguished himself by bringing Mozart's "Don Giovanni" out for the first time in Paris, some ~~40~~ 22 years after it was written! When the Monarchy was restored in France in 1814 he was made dramatic Composer in Ordinary to the King, and wrote an Opera 'Pelage, ou le Roi de la Paix' in honour of the occasion. His big works took him a long time to complete and the next, Olympia occupied him for many years and was not ready till 1819; and then it was not a success. But about that time he was made head of Operatic affairs in Berlin by King Frederick William iii and in Berlin he brought out in 1821 a revised version of Olympia, which for a time was triumphantly successful – and in 1826 it was produced again in Paris.

Checkmated/Freischütz

But meanwhile he was checkmated in Berlin also by the appearance of Weber on the scene with “Der Freischütz” which was in fact performed with overwhelming success in Berlin in the same year that Olympia was given – that is in June 1821; and it very soon took the wind out of Spontini’s sails. Spontini did not take it at all kindly and though he remained on in Berlin as head of the Opera till 1840 his position got worse and worse, chiefly, to all appearance, through his own uncompromising and overbearing disposition. He was finally driven from the Conductor’s desk and from the theatre by an uproar, and left Berlin and returned to Italy where he died in ~~145~~ 1851. Spontini was a very imposing figure and his Operas stand out prominently in the line of Grand Opera between Gluck and the deteriorated, meretricious type of Meyerbeer. He tended in the direction of Meyerbeer mainly in respect of his big use of Orchestral resources, and the generally imposing character of his three principal works.

NB Boieldieu.

Francois Adrien Boieldieu.

His home life very ramshackly(sic) – Father and Mother at cross purposes. Divorce. Boieldieu transferred himself to the house of his master Broche, organist of the Cathedral. Who was a drunkard and brutal. Fled to Paris to escape a punishment and came back to Rouen after. In 1802 unfortunate marriage with Mafleury (?) a dancer.

‘La fille coupable’ Rouen 1793. Success. And others. With charming ballads and chansons.

Boieldieu was for a time Conductor of the Imperial Opera at St Petersburg. (1803-1811) Back to Paris in the latter year. Appointed Professor of the pianoforte at the Conservatoire. All sorts of quaint stories about him. Very modest. Cherubini after the success of Calif “Malheureuse – Are you not ashamed of such underserved success?” Boieldieu mistrusted him though asked him for lessons.

Jean de Paris, 1812 Long interval (14 years) before Dame Blanche (1825). Founded on Scott’s novels the Monastery and Guy Mannering. (Robin Adam) by June 1875 performed same theatre 1340 times. Some writers claim Boieldieu as the greatest master of French Comic Opera

It's odd to have to pass to such a slight and unimpressive figure as Boildieu, but we cannot afford to leave him out of consideration on account of one phenomenally successful Opera. He was born at Rouen where his mother kept a milliner's shop in 1775 and produced some Operas in that town in 1793 and 1795 – which one can hardly expect to have been of much account. He began a popularly successful career in Paris in 1797 with “Le Famille Suisse”. His first success was the Calif de Bagdad (Theatre Feydeau – 30 nights alternating with Cherubini's Medée) - which began its popular career in 1800. He wrote lots more popular Operas, and his great success was “La dame blanche” which made its appearance in 1825. It became one of the most popular of French comic Operas; and the 1000th performance was recorded with much éclat in 1862. Boildieu was regarded as one of the ~~most~~ best of the writers of French light comic Opera, a genus of itself, with good qualities of refinement delicacy, tunefulness and absence of meretricious qualities – but is of no very great consequence to us, except in so far as it maintains the continuity of the story of Opera.

After Dame Blanche produced “the Deux Nuits” a failure. Rotten libretto. Plaisir(?) Pension for Opera Comique vanished through the bankruptcy of that concern. Thiers(?) as minister of duke Philippe gave him a pension of 6,000 for/from? government. He died in 1834.

See previous page.

Auber.

~~He as~~ And there is no doubt that Boieldieu stands in the direct line which was ultimately graced by such composers as Auber, and Gounod and many attractive composers in the same line in more recent times. ~~No Doubt~~ Auber however is a much more imposing figure, but the greater part of his work is in the same line of light French comedy. He was born in 1784 at Caen in Normandy. He did not take to music seriously in his younger days, but wrote little chansons and romances more or less as an amateur. He was in London as a clerk in business in the early years of the century. He began composing little Operas for Paris about 1811, but did not for a time attract much attention.

Cheval de Bronze 1835

When he came across the famous playwright Scribe his success began. The first of their collaborations was Leicester, which came out in 1822, when he was already 38 years old! His more famous Operas began 'Le Macon' in 1825 – and the most famous of all 'Fra Diavolo' came out in 1830 – and “Les Diamants de la Couronne” in 1841. Auber's exceptional genius for this type of this refined, sparkling, artistic work makes him almost a classic in a light line. The whole texture of the works being so delicately poised, in Orchestration and harmony and melody at just the level for this type of work. We may take him as the foremost representative of this branch of Art in its best phase!

Cheval de Bronze

He wrote only one big serious Opera known in France as "La Muette de Portici" and throughout the rest of the world as "Masaniello" It came out in 1828, and gave him a new position in the world of Art. As herein he revealed an unexpected gift of serious expression of dramatic power, and mastery of scheme. It was happily in touch with the spirit of the time, and it is said that its performance in Brussels in 1830 gave the final spur to the revolutionary spirit which thereon broke out in activity and ended with the separation of Holland from Belgium. Auber became a great figure in Parisian Musical life in the latter part of his days. He did not write anything of importance after Masaniello – but he became Director of the

Herold

Conservatoire in 1842 – and maintained that position for many years. He died in Paris during the Commune in May 1871. Again we must turn to a composer of ~~little~~ small calibre by comparison – L.F.J. Herold was born in Paris in 1791 and appears to have begun his musical career by writing popular music for the pianoforte. One may note in this connection his father had been a pupil of Philip Emmanuel Bach. He went to Italy for a time in consequence of his winning the famous “Prix de Rome” a kind of scholarship that was founded to give promising French composers the opportunity of developing their Operatic instincts in that centre of Italian Art! He brought out an Opera successfully there. Then he returned

Jacques Francois Fromental Elias Levi

Halévy
1799- 1862.

to Paris and soon won popularity by producing attractive light Operas and Ballets. His first in Paris was great success in Paris was “Les Rosières” in 1816. Then he had a partial falling off But of success for a time, but revived his position with a comic Opera ‘Marie’ in 1826. He did not arrive altogether at his full renown till ‘Zampa’ which came out at the Opera Comique in 1831 – which still enjoys undiminished popularity, so we are told in Germany. And after that followed the work which is considered his best in France “Le Pré aux clercs” which came out at the Opera Comique in 1832, and rivalled the popularity of Boildieu’s ‘Dame Blanche’ as it arrived at its 1000th performance in Paris in 1871. He died in 1833. He too belongs mainly to the school of elegant French Opera. Yet again we have to record a man of quite secondary singular calibre in Halévy, who was born in Paris in 1799. He like Herold won the Prix de Rome, and went to the

L'Éclair came out in the same year as La Juive 1835

Among a lot of distinguished pupils Bizet was the most notable. Bizet married his daughter.

eternal city for 3 years. When he went back to Paris he found difficulty in getting a hearing, but works of his in the shape of light Opera and a ballet *Manon Lescaut* were performed and he finally made a big success with his serious Opera '*La Juive*' in 1835 (Grand Opera) which has given him a worldwide reputation. He also produced a light Opera '*L'éclair*' with much success. He was appointed Professor of 'Counterpoint and Fugue' at the Conservatoire in 1833 – and it is said that the work familiarly known as Cherubini's treatise on Counterpoint was really written by Halévy under Cherubini's direction. He was also made Professor of Composition in 1840. So we must obviously take him as a serious musician. He wrote a great many Operas after '*La Juive*', but partly owing to the comprehensive success of Meyerbeer at the Grand Opera about this time none attained anything like the success of '*La Juive*' except "*La Reine de Chypre*"

Jakob Liebmann Beer.

Meyerbeer.

As a prodigy of 10 played in public before the King
and Queen of Prussia. Compared to Liszt

which came out in 1841. He lived till 1862 and then died of consumption.

We have so far concerned ourselves with a group of French Composers – and we must now turn to one of the most ~~disputed~~ of adversely discussed of all composers who at least finally made his great position by dominating the French Grand Opera. He was born in Berlin in 1791 of wealthy Jewish parents, his father was a banker – his real name being Beer. He showed quite extraordinary natural aptitudes from early years. He was a very brilliant pianist and revealed an exceptional gift for reading from score. He began as a fellow pupil of Weber's under the Abbé Vogler. His first attempt in the line of Opera was Jephthah's vow – which was not a success. Then two Caliphs in 1814 was hardly any more successful. So this young Meyerbeer appealed for Salieri's advice – Salieri of the Gluck connection and ~~Beethoven~~ Mozart's rival.

Italy

Tancredi 1813

Weber said “My heart bleeds to see a German Composer of creative power stoop to become an imitator in order to win favour with the crowd”. They remained friends however.

Crociato Venice 1824

Salieri advised his going to Italy – and thither Meyerbeer went – and arrived just when the Rossini fever was beginning to take possession of Italians with “Tancredi”. Meyerbeer was infected with the style, and began writing Operas in the Italian style much to Weber’s disgust! He wrote several successful works in this manner.”Romilda and Costanza” (Padua 1815) ‘Semiramide’ June 1819. Margarite de Anjou, Scala at Milan. Then he got tired of his Italian style and tried a combination of German and Italian in “Crociato in Egitto” The Crusades in Egypt – which was also a success; and reached Paris in 1826 – and thither he went to hear it; and very soon made up his mind that Paris was the place for him, and set to work with much deliberation and ability to develop his place for the conquest of the Grand Opera.

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He gave careful consideration to the style of French Grand Opera and the French Operatic disposition in general. He got hold of Scribe as his librettist and taking plenty of time to mature his coup, finally astonished the Parisians, with *Roberto il Diavolo* in 1831. Its success was so great that it raised him speedily to a height of European fame. He proceeded again with the same deliberation as before and made his next coup with the *Huguenots* in 1836. This naturally astonished and delighted the Parisians still more. For the subject is unquestionably vividly interesting, and M's immense theatrical instinct had made the Opera immensely imposing. For years later it was produced in Berlin, with so much success that the King Frederick William IV of Prussia

The Great Duet in Act 2(?) Honey and Webster

Peter the Great and Catherine. The big song with the
flutes Dans Soupirs(?) Soupire

made Meyerbeer the General Musical Director of the Opera, and to Berlin he moved for a time. This is the explanation of his writing a German Opera in the middle of what may be called his French period – as he wrote for Berlin “Das Feldlager in Schlesien” in 1843 – in which Madame Jenny Lind made a very successful appearance. In fact she is said to have made the success of the Opera for a time. When Meyerbeer ~~who~~ went back to Paris he used up a good deal of the music in ‘L’etoile du Nord’ a light opera which was produced at the Opera Comique in 1854. Meanwhile he was getting ready more huge works. He had begun L’Africaine a good while before – but the next big Opera to come before the public was “Le Prophete” in 1849. (It was finished in 1848) Again

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a very fine and interesting subject, finely presented by Scribe the librettist. The last big composition of the famous group of French Grand Operas was L'Africaine. Meyerbeer had the greatest difficulty in satisfying himself about it and rewrote it several times. He worried Scribe the librettist so much with demands for alterations in the book that Scribe for a time withdrew ~~the book~~ it altogether. He did not get it to his liking till 1863, when at last it was put in rehearsal. But his life's course was then nearly run and he did not live to see it performed. He was taken ill on April 23 and died on May 2. And it was at last performed after ~~these~~ over 20 years of ~~preparation~~ rewriting and remodelling in 1865. It is of course much to his credit that he was so self critical, and it adds to the historic interest of the work that different portions of the work should

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represent periods so widely apart. The case is not unique, as we know that there is a passage in Parsifal (which was produced in 1882) which dates from 1854. (Char Freitag's Zauber) Besides these phenomenal works written for the French Grand Opera on the very grandest scale, he produced the Incidental Music to 'Struensee' which contains some of his best music, in 1846, and an idyllic Opera 'Le Pardon de Ploermel ou Dinorah' in 1859 at the Opera Comique. It must also be remembered to his honour that he gave the first one of the earliest presentation of one of Wagner's earliest Operas Rienzi in Berlin in 1847, and he also brought about the performance of 'Der Fliegende Holländer' in the same town later. The world is indebted to him for being one of the first to hold out the hand of a helpful hand to Wagner. Who in Rienzi at least shows much of Meyerbeer's influence.

~~Miss Smith~~

Miss? Ah mon fils

It is quite conceivable that the feeling that he had in ~~Rienzi~~ been on a wrong path in ~~Rienzi~~ and that it was unworthy of him that accounts for Wagner's detestation of Meyerbeer, which is expressed in his well known saying that 'Meyerbeer was a Jew banker to whom it occurred to compose Operas'. No composer has ever been more adversely discussed. ~~Composers~~ Musicians endowed with any depth of sincere feeling such as Schumann and Wagner have generally disliked him. The fashionable Amateurs who delight in great displays of histrionic effect, ~~and extraordinary powers of stage histrionic prowess~~ have generally delighted in him. The sense of artificiality is inevitably predominant. There is a lack of genuine musical quality, of sensitive feeling, of conscientiousness in his work. He made a bid for success with full consciousness of the deficiencies of his audiences, and he won it. It was ~~the~~ work made for a special time and for special conditions – The Opera patronised by the wealthy classes of Paris, and for this it was ideally suited.

Elsewhere said his most striking characteristic was his genius for purely theatrical effect. His kind of Opera dazzles the eye and astonishes the senses, but he makes no appeal to our deeper feelings and emotions. He carried the French taste for display to a climax and surpassed everyone who had preceded him in supplying fit music for crowded scenes and pompous spectacles. He was a great master of all the technique of his Art, both in Orchestration and the vocal parts of his work. His works are the Grandest of Grand Operas in the French sense but they ring artificial and hollow.

See also Schumann quoted in Davis's book p 46.

It was not a product of the conviction of the individual ~~comp~~ personality, but an accommodation; by which he showed his marvellous cleverness but none of the genuine impulse which moved the really great composers. ~~At the same time~~ And a good test of his incompleteness as a composer is that no-one would take his works, for all their success, as models. We may admit that he achieved moments, finales, passages which are quite extraordinarily effective. His gives an adequate expression of passion, and a telling historic presentation of ~~great~~ situations of vast human interest. In a sense he expanded the sphere of Orchestration in so far as colour could minister to theatrical effect; but the musical material, though often captivating, is not of the sort we want to live with. He was certainly most fortunate in his choice of subjects, for the nearly all have some wide human significance – And this illustrates the shrewdness of his disposition, about which there can be no question.

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It is really rather perplexing to know how to deal consistently with the crowd of composers to whom we must give attention just about this time. For parallel with Meyerbeer we have a great and successful representation of the Italian style of Opera, some of whose successes were prior in date to his. Though he was as a matter of fact junior to him, Giacomo Rossini was born the year after Meyerbeer, in 1792 at Pesaro near Ancona – from which place he took the complimentary nickname the Swan of Pesaro. His father was town trumpeter, and inspector of slaughter houses an a merry fellow. His musical education was of the most remarkably descriptive. He had lessons on the harpsichord for 3 years from a man who taught him to play his scales in the old style – as they say with 8 fingers. Then for a time he was apprenticed to a Smith. Then at about the age of 12 or 13 he made a little money by singing, and got some more useful lessons in harmony and singing. Then he was ~~admitted~~

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admitted to the Liceo comunale of Bologna, where he was taught the cello and counterpoint. But the latter subject was thoroughly unconquered and he never penetrated very far into its mysteries. However he developed a very laudable appreciation for the works of Haydn and Mozart and the latter certainly had a good deal of excellent influence on his developing style, which is confirmed by the nickname his Italian contemporaries gave him of 'Il Tedeschino': the little German. His first chance of distinguishing himself was an invitation to write an Opera for Venice in 1810, and for the opportunity he wrote a one act Opera buffa "The Matrimonial Market" which was very successful - and he followed this up with several more light comic works in which some characteristic strokes made their appearance as for instance the well known crescendo which he is said to have imitated from a composer called Generali. The first big Opera which made a great mark was Tancredi an Opera seria which was produced at the Teatro Fenice in Venice in 1813.

Paisiello
Barbieri

The public went fairly mad over it, and the composer became from that time and remained for the rest of his life a popular hero. We cannot follow all his compositions in detail. He had one or two failures, one which is the most remarkable example of that order in existence. In 1816 he produced in the Teatro Argentina in Rome a comic Opera by the name of 'Almaviva' founded on Beaumarchais's famous play the Barber of Seville, and it so happened that the popular composer Paisiello had written an Opera on the same subject which was very popular with the Roman patrons of Opera. So they took it into their heads that it was presumption on the part of the young composer to attempt the same subject and squarely hissed it. However in spite of the hissing the management went on performing

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the Opera and it gained in favour, and before long under the title of the “Barbiere di Siviglia” became one of the most popular comic Operas ever written. Of its kind it is no doubt a masterpiece and the tunes in it (though not all Rossini’s own; for one very popular one is stolen from Haydn’s Seasons) made everyone happy. In the same year 1816 he also produced his Opera seria ‘Otello’, a very important specimen of his work – which contains moreover some significant improvements on the conventions of Italian Opera. It is worth observing that in his first version he loyally gave the tragic story according to Shakespeare – but the Italians would not stand it, and a happy conclusion to the play had to be devised to suit the low taste of ~~Operatic~~ Italian audiences.

Cinderella.
A delightful subject for a comic Opera.
The song at the end 'non più mesta'
Miss Kershaw.

Rossini to Paris 1823 and London

Rossini followed Otello up with another Opera buffa Cenerentola, which came out in Rome in 1817. It is regarded as the best of his works in that line after Barbiere. 'La Gazza Ladra' also came out in that year. Then there followed his biblical Opera 'Mose in Egitto' in 1818, Semiramide in 1823. In that year Rossini went to Paris for the first time, ~~and~~ on his way to England, where he had been invited to come by the manager of the King's Theatre, who offered him a large sum for an Opera to be produced there. The Opera was not produced as the manager went bankrupt. But Rossini made up for the loss of the money by making appearances at

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parties in private houses. He went to Brighton and was introduced to George IV by the Russian Ambassador. He sang in a cantata called "homage à Lord Byron" at Almacks(?) and in a duet with Caberlan(?) from "Matrimonio Segreto", and after about 5 months of such work and accompanying he amassed £7000. From England he went back to Paris and settled there for some time; having accepted the appointment of Musical Director of the Theatre Italien. It is not of much service to chronicle the successive productions of the succeeding years in Paris till 1829. Rossini brought out a lot of his earlier Operas with magnificent casts; for the singers always delighted

Comte Ory /drinking songs/Beethoven no.8. Schm(?)

in his tuneful and florid music. He also paid Meyerbeer the compliment of performing his Crociato in Egitto in 1825. He had the libretto of “Mose in Egitto” revised as Moise and produced that also with great success in 1827. He brought out a lyric Opera ‘Le Comte Ory’ in 1828, and paid Beethoven the unconscious compliment of adopting one of his tunes in it, as he had done before to Haydn in the Barbieri. Indeed it is said that he paid a great deal of attention to Beethoven’s Symphonies about this time, which is explained by his friendship and association with Habeneck the conductor of the Concerts of the Conservatoire, who was a great worshipper of Beethoven and had with some difficulty induced the French Orchestra to play the C minor. The influence of Beethoven is often held answerable for the change in his Operatic style which is manifested in Guillaume Tell. There were probably

Guillaume Tell

Note the parallel in Lulli's case. The instinct of the French for keeping the drama in sight.

Sombre forêt
Miss Honey

a great many influences at work. Hearing the kind of Operas which were in vogue in Paris must have influenced him. The attitude of mind of the French towards Art also. At any rate the whole conception of Guillaume Tell is different from his early Opera. The subject is of more immediate human interest and of wider significance. And that too must certainly have had great influence upon his style. With all the reckless abandon and spontaneous gaiety of Rossini's disposition he always rings more sincere than Meyerbeer; and a subject which appealed to him in such a sense brought out unexpected ~~solidity~~ ~~of~~ warmth of presentation.

The work came out at the Academie on Aug 3 1829. In a sense it appeared to inaugurate to new zeal(?) in serious Operatic Art. The supreme skill of the writer of Italian melody was ~~projected as the scheme of dramatic~~ put at the service of drama. Even ~~for~~ in the Overture the change of attitude was apparent; for its intrinsic connection with the drama itself is evident – and the claims of the drama are left well in sight

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throughout. It would be natural to hope that Rossini himself would be the continuation of the new Operatic departure which Guillaume Tell inaugurated. But strangely enough it was his last Opera. ~~His career as an Opera composer ended at the age of 77,~~ Though he lived till 1868, to the mature age of 77, his career as an Opera composer ended at the age of 36! Nothing much stranger has ever happened in musical history. Various explanations have been offered. One that he was disgusted with the success of Meyerbeer – and that explanation is confirmed by a saying of his “that he intended to ~~wait to write~~ put off writing any more till the Jews had finished their Sabbath!” There were many other reasons too. The revolution of July 1830 changed the face of Paris for him, and the new masters played him false – repudiating the agreements with him which had been made by the previous government. However he continued to live ~~in Paris~~ without any loss of prestige in a villa near Paris;

The Rossinian crescendo

His personality was so attractive and the continued personality of his Operas was so great that he was described by a contemporary wit as “enjoying all the honours of a departed hero of the people without having to undergo the preliminary of departing”.

Rossini's mark on the history of Opera is of course of a very decisive kind. In his early days he vastly improved the quality and singableness of solo vocal music. His gift for tune was supreme, even when he borrowed other people's he did it with such an unconscious air that no one could blame him for it. His instinct for effect was very good too though he often made his effects by little better than claptrap. He was ahead of all the Italian Opera composers of his time in the management of his Orchestra, and the creation of his music as a whole was much more musicianly (and) at a better level of interest than the average Italian

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Opera composer. He had more sense of the dramatic exigencies than his compatriots, and did a good deal towards bringing recitative into line with the rest of the music. A little detail worth noting, as showing his carefulness, that he wrote out the flourishes and trills and cadenzas for the singers, which Italian composers had too often left to the caprices of the singers, but on the other hand he carried these decorative features to extravagant excess. He was the better fitted to do these as he had been an admirable singer himself. Tell stands alone for its musical quality – but that doesn't lessen his credit – rather the reverse. By the time he wrote it he was the most successful Opera composer

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in Europe. To change his tactics at the last was a courageous stroke, and to have achieved such a success in lines which were not according to his wont is a thing that merits full and admiring recognition. He did write one or two things, not in the Operatic line, after Tell. The famous popular 'Stabat Mater' made its public appearance in 1841, and the Messe Solennelle in 1864 – and a Cantata in honour of the Exhibition of 1867. They all have characteristic attractiveness and also characteristic elements. The opinions held of him by the great ones of the earth are curious and interesting. Mendelssohn stood up for him, so did Schumann – who hated Meyerbeer. Schubert was even influenced by him and

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called him a “rare genius”. Berlioz on the other hand would like to have burnt all his music and his followers with it. And Ingres the famous painter called his music “the Music of a dishonest man”. He was typical Italian. Bursting with natural musical ability and spontaneity, and quite impossible! (?) The great facility encouraging a spendthrift’s lack of self criticism. It was not dishonest – merely strange to say, indolence combined with a careless kind of recklessness. Of the Italian composers who belonged to the same stratum as Rossini one ought probably to mention Mercadante who was a little younger – born 1797. The name is little more than an echo

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to us nowadays and it is hard to realise that he was actually a contemporary of Rossini. He got some of his education at Naples and brought out his first Opera there buffa “Violenza è Constanza” there in 1819. His most important serious Opera was Eliza e Claudio which came out in Milan in 1822. He obtained a great reputation throughout Europe and was in regard made successful visits to Vienna, Madrid, Paris. In the latter town he produced “I Briganti” in 1836, and another successful Opera ‘Il Giuramento’ came out in Milan in 1837. He was appointed Director of the Conservatorio in Naples in 1840 – ~~became blind~~ lost an eye at the battle of Navara, became blind in 1862 and died in 1870.

Donizetti 1798

Far more familiar of course is the name of Donizetti who was born the year after Mercadante in 1798, at Bergamo. He studied at the Conservatorio of Naples. His line was Rossinian with a difference; and he was much beloved by the singers for whom he wrote much that was very pleasant to sing. His first success was Enrico di Borgogna, produced at Vienna in 1818. He produced very rapidly, and no wonder, for there is uncommonly little strain in producing Opera of the Italian type of that day. He won a triumphant success in Rome with Zoraida di Granata in 1819 and was carried in triumph and crowned at the Capital by the excited people. The first Opera which gave him European fame was "Anna Bolena" first performed at Milan in 1830, which came to London and was very popular here, having such magnificent singers to further its success as Pasta, Rubini and Lablanche.

Figlia

Elisir d'Amore came out in Milan in 1832, ~~Lucia di Lammermoor~~ which is still performed, was written for Naples in 1835. Favorita, Lucrezia Borgia in 1834 in Paris. Don Pasquale in 1843 also in Paris. In all he wrote a vast number of Operas – as he could write them very fast, and they have the very least artistic value. He died in 1848. Vincenzo Bellini belongs to the same order of fashionable Opera composers; he was born at Catania in Sicily in 1802; and he also went to Naples and studied at the Conservatorio. His first Opera was produced when he was still a pupil of that Institution, and was heard by the famous Opera manager Barbaja, who at once saw the useful gifts of the young composer and afforded him the opportunity to produce an Opera at the San Carlo. For this he wrote “Bianca e Ferdinando” which was very successful. So Barbaja gave him another commission. Then Bellini fell in with the

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famous Tenor Rubini, and the new Opera was written in retirement in the country under his supervision. The result “Il Pirata” with Rubini singing in it was a positive furore. And it at once went round the Opera houses of Europe. ‘La Straniera’ followed in 1828 in Milan; and Bellini became the adored composer of all the greatest Italian singers alive. We need not follow his productions in detail. It’s more than enough to record his principal successes. The well known Sonnambula in 1831. Norma at Milan in 1831. ‘I Puritani’ his last Opera in 1835. And he died in that same year 1835. We can’t take this class of opera very seriously. The composers standard was purely superficial. They made no attempt at consistency of detail and were quite

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to write pretty tunes with the baldest conventional dance accompaniments, which had no relevance whatever to the situations in the dramas. The whole thing was done without any serious concentration of mind, as a sort of pleasant entertainment for their fashionable patrons. The Opera stood or fell merely on the grounds of the tunes supplied to the singers ~~were effected~~ lent themselves to the skill of the first rate singers and the tunes were attractive. Their attitude of mind is inconceivable to us now – and the best that can be said of them was that they let down the Opera (as a branch of Art) so low that the reaction facilitated the ultimate victory of Wagner and the composers who took their art more seriously.

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